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## The Emergencies of Creative-Relational Inquiry

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**ABSTRACT** This essay is written in response to the emergence (or emergencies) of creative-relational inquiry, and in the writing and with the theory, thought thinks through what such inquiry can do, will do, strives to do, and must do. **KEYWORDS** Creative-relational inquiry; Immanence; Étienne Souriau; Hyphen

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This essay offers one little singularity or absolute of a coming together of thought about what creative-relational inquiry (C-RI) can do.<sup>1</sup> Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova write that creativity (and I would argue creative-relational inquiry) is “not an optional extra but a necessity in our fast-changing times.”<sup>2</sup> In writing this essay, I encountered many “emergencies” that shaped thought. These “emergencies” encompass both the emergent coming to be and the *nee-naw* urgency of creative-relational inquiry. This essay gives these particular emergencies some elbowroom,<sup>3</sup> a space to strive, and to edge into the singularities of the creative, then the relational, before inquiring what the hyphen does to these different practices.<sup>4</sup>

Its research center carries creative-relational inquiry (CCRI or, as otherwise known, Sea-Cry) at the University of Edinburgh. Still, you could argue that previous to the center’s presence, the concept was produced through and by the university’s Counselling and Psychotherapy Department, where Jonathan Wyatt—and myself, alongside Rosie Stenhouse, Marisa de Andrade, and Edgar Rodríguez-Dorans—are based. It would follow that any new approach to inquiry coming from such a department, albeit necessary to the approach’s nature to move into more transdisciplinary space, would nonetheless have “relation” in its name and at its heart. Research in this field is concerned with the messiness of relationships and social life. This particular department, Counselling and Psychotherapy, has troubled and challenged the field’s pull toward research that facilitates evidence-based practice and has specialized in often-evocative approaches to qualitative inquiry that push for the power

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of example.<sup>5</sup> Such research, including some of the department's master's dissertations, have transformed both policy and practice.

It is human relationships that lie at the center of counselling and psychotherapy, arguably two humans, client and therapist, subject and object, unplugged yet in contact, emotionally. Though dynamic, research in this field is often felt most relevant when it is about the psyche, the oedipal, and the soul. But as creative-relational inquiry opens inquiry up to thinking more creatively about relation and what that includes, then the previously felt overdeterminacy of subject and object leads to creative-relational inquiry's first emergency.

**EMERGENCY 1: THE CREATIVE-RELATIONAL IS INTERESTED IN OPENING UP INQUIRY TO PROCESS AND NOVELTY AND TO THE MORE-THAN ONE, MORE-THAN TWO, AND MORE-THAN THREE.**

The "creative" was originally called to meet the "relational" by Alfred North Whitehead.<sup>6</sup> He was first to coin the term "creativity." As Michael Halewood writes, "This bears repeating. Prior to his use of the word 'creativity' in *Religion in the Making* in 1926 (Whitehead, 1927, p. 77), this word was not extant in the English language. 'Creativity' is a term of Whitehead's own devising."<sup>7</sup> Tired of the presupposition of subject and object, the term was conceived to generate a function or a "scheme of thought"<sup>8</sup> that could work to open up new ways of thinking about relationality that brought process and novelty into the conversation. Therefore, creativity has always been linked to the relational rather than to the individual as an attribute, flair, or a skill to hone. Creativity opens up the phenomenological situation where William James writes that "everything that comes out of experience has to make a choice, so to speak, and either line up on the side of the thing to be known, or on the side of the knowing consciousness."<sup>9</sup> But Bruno Latour in his reading of Whitehead and James asks, "Can philosophy be forced at long last to count beyond one or two (subject and object) or even three (subject, object, and going beyond subject and object through some dialectal sleight of hand)?"<sup>10</sup>

The first emergency comes from the building and bumping up against invisible walls<sup>11</sup> created by the bricks of this bifurcation. These walls contain the familial situation that holds and stills subjects and objects and constrains thought from moving toward thinking about the wider forces at work, no longer open to surprise of what is outside of our "self"-protective enclosures.<sup>12</sup> Around 2016, Jonathan is feeling an urgency to provide space for research that can open up such debates and more, but the concept of creative-relational inquiry is still not quite there yet. Not-yetness becomes emergency number two.

**EMERGENCY 2: THE CREATIVE-RELATIONAL IS AN INVENTIVE  
APPROACH TO INQUIRY THAT IS ATTENTIVE TO NOT-YET  
TEMPORALITIES.**

It is still circa 2016 when creative-relational inquiry slowly begins to create itself as Jonathan reads *The Nonhuman Turn*.<sup>13</sup> He turns to Brian Massumi's chapter, "The Supernormal Animal," and he reads this short sentence: "Creatively-relationally more-than human."<sup>14</sup>

Creatively-relationally more-than human.

Creative-relationally.

A blink-pause.

A micro shock<sup>15</sup>

Somewhere a lightning bolt accepts an invite to land.

*This* lightning bolt.

*This* landing.

From here, creative-relational inquiry emerges as, well, actually, it emerges as nothing yet, just a perishable marker for the not-quite-yet. Not yet ready.

Not-quite yet. A not-yet temporality.<sup>16</sup>

Erin Manning writes, "An occasion of experience always holds such a marker—once it has come to concrescence, it will always be what it was."<sup>17</sup> But what was it? What is it? What are its emergencies? What does it or can it do? And how do we attend to its growing-in-the event?<sup>18</sup> Is it possible, asks Rebecca Coleman, to "comprehend and perhaps provoke different possible, desired or imagined futures?"<sup>19</sup> And is it possible, I add, that creative-relational inquiry may in itself be able to act as a moving incubator for inquiry as process, for knowledge that is not-quite-yet-ready to be felt, and potentially born to soon?

I imagine Jonathan turning the page to the future (again).

***Creative-Relational Inquiry***

Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari write that "philosophy is at once concept creation and instituting on the plane."<sup>20</sup> In this section, new emergencies surface as I think through the theories of Deleuze and Guattari, and Étienne Souriau to see how "creation" and "instituting" may relate to the "creative" of creative-relational inquiry.

But first, a reverie.

*I am facilitating a group of students in a process group in London. There are 32 of them who meet with three facilitators and we sit in one big circle. This group has no agenda other than to see what emerges, relationally. Thirty-two people means that there are more than 756 human relationships in the circle. The more-than human relations are more than I can count. But they are there. There are sirens and birdsong, and steam on the window and the echo of the early-evening winter sun outside. There is chaos in the silence, never stillness. Always tension. There is nothing and/but competition and participation. Someone speaks out into the crowd. Content is a weapon to break through the strained atmosphere. They say they are cold. The group receives the contribution as relevant, and it works as relief from the intensity of the space. Another says they are cold too. Then, an unexpected sound comes from one person in the room. A high-pitched inhale maybe, quieter than a scream but loud enough that people startle and stare. The student makes the sound again. Brows furrow. It's odd. Senseless. Without meaning. Contentless. Feet shuffle. Then the sound comes again. The students look around and away. Someone dares to differ, not enough to make an unrecognizable sound—but a more palatable difference—they are not cold. They are warm. The strange sound repeats again. The radiators are on, but they are not turned up high. And again. There are a few awkward laughs. But these sounds, although just as strange in terms of ineffability, are understood by the group and so are passable, contagious even. The sounds—the hiccups let's call them although I'm not sure they are, maybe more in the sense of a hiccup as in interruption—are not persuasive. They don't move the group to care. The sounds are not germ-like and nobody joins in. Someone says it is also cold outside.*

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**EMERGENCY 3: THE CREATIVE-RELATIONAL IS INQUIRY THAT ATTENDS TO THE AWKWARD, NONSENSICAL RESPONSES TOWARD A CONCEPT'S CARNAL-SQUIRMING-STUTTERING INTO MATTERING.**

In their obscurity and without a sociality to embrace them, the hiccups produced awkwardness and confusion and appeared to be rejected as irrelevant. Deleuze and Guattari write, "There are only immanent criteria. A possibility of life is evaluated through itself in the movement it lays out and the intensities it creates on a plane of immanence: what is not laid out or created is rejected."<sup>21</sup> In the case of the hiccups, in a process group where the participants are learning attunement, to listen to more than the words, did they fail to attend to the event? Perhaps, but this would be too anthropocentric a view. Isabelle Stengers

writes, “Using Whitehead’s own concepts, in order to describe this failure, one could say that the experience did not achieve socialisation. The students’ habitual thought patterns endured, whilst the interstices, where the possibility of original, new lures for feeling lurked, closed down.”<sup>22</sup> The “hiccups” would have to do the work of providing a lure.

Rebecca Coleman, Tara Page, and Helen Palmer write: “The materialisation of a [new] concept is simultaneously tricky and breathtakingly simple. In an academic setting, the uncomfortable or awkward reaction to a concept’s mattering (through image, sound, bodily movement or any combination of renderings) is important and should be attended to. To render concepts materially through practice forces us out of the comfort zone of using preterminded words or phrases, and we can no longer rely on jargon. Each material articulation is created and perceived anew.”<sup>23</sup> Creative-relational inquiry, I would argue, is inquiry that pays close attention to the necessary awkwardness of fledgling knowledge and concepts striving to matter. It takes interest and is curious about minor acts<sup>24</sup> and strives to create space to lay out the indeterminate, listening for unintelligible attempts to lure. In fact, creative-relational inquiry, as discussed below, is not just open to, but also invites, such lures.

#### CREATION AND/OR INSTAURATION?

*Emergency 4: Creative-Relational Inquiry Is an Expansive and Desiring Sea-Crying-Out for Lightning to Strike (Again) as It Attends to the “Cloud’s Seductive Overtures.”*<sup>25</sup>

Deleuze and Guattari use different words to indicate what thought does differently as concerns to the plane of immanence and the creation of concepts.<sup>26</sup> Leonard Lawlor explains, “In relation to the plane of immanence, thought ‘institutes,’ while in relation to concepts it ‘creates.’”<sup>27</sup> When Deleuze and Guattari write about thought “instituting,” they draw on the work of the aesthete Souriau. They write, “Aware of creative activity in philosophy, [Souriau] invoked a kind of plane of instauration as the soil of this creation.”<sup>28</sup>

In *L’Instauration philosophique*, Souriau doesn’t draw the same distinction between “instauration” and “creation”; instead, he uses the word “instauration” in place of the word “creation.”<sup>29</sup> Perhaps he would have preferred to name C-RI, “instaurative-relational inquiry.” He found the word *creative* to be “full of traps”—too anthropocentric and too based on the material, famously writing that “the bud does not create the rose.”<sup>30</sup> But the main difference is that, as Lawlor writes, “To instaurate means less to establish a thing, a moral or a

physical being, temporally than to establish it spiritually, and to constitute it, to grant to it reality in its own kind.”<sup>31</sup> Manning writes, “Instauration is the art of bringing into existence,” but without a subject or object driving the movement, and she also writes, “Instauration is the concept Souriau gives to the shift that activates the dephasing through which a mode of existence comes into being.”<sup>32</sup> This means that for Souriau, a mode of existence is not necessarily the creation that emerges for the first time, but instead it is new once it is *received* for the first time, and I would add not necessarily by humans but received through openness, hence the need for a lure. This idea evokes Whitehead when he writes, “The creature receives a reaction from the world.”<sup>33</sup> In this way, creation is not about succession but coexistence. A mode of existence, however, may need to strike more than once before it can be realized and coexist. Think of a bolt of lightning. It is said that lightning never strikes in the same place twice, but the Empire State Building is struck on average 23 times a year.<sup>34</sup> Vicki Kirby writes, “Tall buildings, vast bodies of water and other objects on the ground can initiate strikes by sending out what are called upward moving ‘ladders’ of invitation to a visually undetected downward travelling spark, called a ‘stepped leader’ or vice versa. Martin Uman explains this moment of initiation in terms of speech acts.”<sup>35</sup> C-RI, then, is open to receive, to metamorphize through relation. It cries out to be the soil for the dephasing of inquiries still to come, striving to matter, to bring each other into existence. This leads to the fifth emergency.

*Emergency 5: Creative-Relational Inquiry Is Interested in Keeping the Problem Alive. It Is on the Side of Force Rather Than Form.*

A reverie

*It was the end of my session with my client John who autism flows through. Time had been a theme of our sessions. He always felt outside of time. John was still holding my plastic elephant that he had fidgeted with throughout the session. I said that I would see him at 3:30 p.m. the following week. He put the elephant down on the corner of the table and said, “Why don’t you just say that you’ll meet me here at elephant cornering?”*

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In the field of counseling, it is often said that we should “trust the process.” This saying acts as a reminder to stay with a client’s sense of stuckness, to not try to fix or rescue or rush to find solutions but instead to get out of the way, trusting that the work will be done if we keep being in relationship and keep the tension alive.



This trust seems more viable, less risky in practice than in research, and partly processed feels more acceptable. The client, after all, is not a project. Souriau is adamant that there is no such thing as a project as any completion of a project is just a chance synchronism.<sup>36</sup> There can only be a trajectory, an instauration, a process, or maybe even responsive streaks of melting tendencies that touch then step.

Souriau calls the space from incipency to existence an assault course.<sup>37</sup> What if the work always remains incipient, a draft, incomplete, lacking content and findings? Souriau writes, “Up to a certain point the finished work is always a novelty, discovery or surprise. There is a so, that’s what I was looking for! That’s what I was meant to make!”<sup>38</sup> But that moment of knowing, though both cathartic for client and researchers alike, is not necessarily the goal. Instauration itself is an intensifier that keeps the problem alive. David Lapoujade writes, “The force of a problem is not its internal tension. . . . It is the uncertainty that it introduces in the (re)distribution of reality.”<sup>39</sup> The uncertainty, if it can be tolerated and held long enough, through its awkward ineffability, may eventually manifest into the creation of new realities. In therapy, clients are often desperate for a solution to their problems. Therapists may often be heard saying that therapy works but it takes time, it doesn’t, can’t, shouldn’t happen quickly. Not if the work is truly to create change that makes a difference. If it is crucial to tentatively keep the problem alive in order to resist feel-good yet short-lived certainty, then how can urgency be attended to in slowness?

#### *Emergency 6: Creative-Relational Inquiry Slowly, Urgently (Dis)Creates New Concepts as It Goes.*

*After John’s proposition that we stop meeting at 3:30 p.m., and instead meet at elephant cornering, we began to meet differently every week. We (re)oriented ourselves to the new realities that had been iteratively instaured. One week we met at Elephant Cornering and the next at Tiger Hanging and the following week, we met at Penguin Cocooning. We began to form new ways of encountering the process, keeping the problem of being, feeling outside of time, alive. Arranging our meetings only through the animal-furniture, we had also begun to form a habit and an instituted way of being in the world.*

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Elephant Cornering moves into an unfolding field of concern, while the hiccups of the earlier reverie dissipate and yield back into obscurity because Elephant Cornering affected, met an open cavity, with a capacity to receive and



was admitted into feeling. In order to be admitted into feeling, two actions must happen. The mode must *propose* existence and then *receive* an invitation to land. Latour writes that there is “one condition: the act of instauration has to provide the opportunity to encounter beings capable of worrying you.”<sup>40</sup> Elephant Cornering is a proposition that is persuasive and demands involvement. This active persuasion is an active participant, alongside the openness to persuasion, in a new mode of existence’s coming to be.<sup>41</sup>

For Deleuze and Guattari, instauration is the soil but the creation of novelty *is* possible and the creation of concepts is the creative act and the art of philosophy.<sup>42</sup> Fredrika Spindler writes that concepts are “intensive events,” where thought “crystallizes into a specific formulation responding to the specific problem at stake.”<sup>43</sup> This act is separate from but dependent on the instituting of the plane of immanence. For Deleuze and Guattari, repetition is necessary for a concept’s concrescence, but they disagree with Souriau’s thought that repetition is required *because* existence is not possible the first time around, suggesting that a concept needs to be found rather than created. They write, “We shall say that the plane of immanence is, at the same time, that which must be thought and that which cannot be thought.”<sup>44</sup>

So, what to do with the hiccup? Novelty, “the new,” if surprises are no predictors of whether the work will or should be possible, and Souriau warns against birth (of the concept) at the wrong time?<sup>45</sup> At times, perhaps, it is necessary to discreate or abandon concepts as concepts are not always desirable or become no longer useful, or even detrimental or faithless. But, at the same time, if at the moment of becoming, a new concept is not received or put to work, this may be of political concern. As Manning says in an interview with Halbe Kuipers, “Whiteness is the effortlessness of finding your place in existence. Whiteness is the assumption that the world is yours to inhabit and yours to define.” In the same interview, Manning also says, “Neurotypicality claims space in very precise ways. It claims bodyings too. It moves without a stim. It speaks without an accent. It enters without a stir.”<sup>46</sup> The work’s striving for existence through relevance is political. If the work is not admissible (or complete), then the problem is still alive, the potential to exist is still a strong current waterfaling freely. In this sense, there is urgency in the slowness to dam or capture, a political waiting felt as a refusal, a dodge to survive seen as a procrastination—a will against a murderous external rhythm seen as incapacity to complete. The work has the right to remain a draft, this can be its power, even if the writer, like the counselor, wills it to completion. Incomplete, it can always be part of

future-pastness<sup>47</sup> bidding its time, so as not to be born before its time. Therefore, creative-relational inquiry does not contort new knowledge or new modes of existence to admit it to understanding but involves what Manning writes involves “an attunement to what has fallen out of sensation and perception.”<sup>48</sup>

The “relational” brings its own emergencies.

## CREATIVE-RELATIONAL INQUIRY

Reverie

*We meet in our progress group for the first time. We are strangers in a circle sitting with attractions, repulsions, (pre)tensions, desires, and a yearning for relation. As Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg writes, “We communicate to one another the light our eyes know, the ground that sustains our postures, and the air and the warmth with which we speak. We face one another as condensations of earth, light, air and warmth.”<sup>49</sup> Each new configuration of relations sparks something new.*

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## EMERGENCY 7: CREATIVE-RELATIONAL INQUIRY IS INTERESTED IN THE COMING TOGETHER OF NEW CONTRASTS.

Massumi writes that “nonrelation is the necessary condition of creativity.”<sup>50</sup> Perhaps we would be better to think N-C-RI, or nonrelational-creative-relational inquiry. Nonrelation is illuminated by the many different pathways the lightning bolt could experiment and in the sense that matter is “promiscuous and inventive in its agential wonderings.”<sup>51</sup> These poly-relational options may not seem particularly touchy-feely.<sup>52</sup> And worse, touch is impossible, separated as we are by electrons, atoms,<sup>53</sup> and rigid, unbending hyphens. However, what perhaps we can take comfort from is that the “field of relation crackles with desire.”<sup>54</sup> The lightning bolt sets off, but it doesn’t know where it may land until the final moments. The tension culminates in the (lightning-bolt) strike of the event where something is created, and a new contrast comes together. The creative with the relational. Whatever pathway finally becomes actualized, or new imaginary sparked, it is conditioned by an electromagnetic differential<sup>55</sup> or, as Whitehead may call it, “sheer individuality”<sup>56</sup> amid diversity. These are relations-of-nonrelation. Relations that could not exist without relations that never did. The never-did relations are a condition for relation and therefore are relationally non-relational! The flash is the “being” of relation. To be is to be felt, to be touched.

To register through empathy that doesn't place value on one mode of existence over another.

#### EMERGENCY 8: CREATIVE-RELATIONAL INQUIRY PRODUCES KNOWLEDGE DISROBED OF SOVEREIGNTY.

How might it be possible to achieve an attunement to what has more gently touched, or to pay attention to the paler and more subtle lures? How do we properly see what we have learned not to recognize, or to hear? In the field of counseling and psychotherapy, empathy is a core condition<sup>57</sup> for a therapeutic relationship. Empathy in its original sense (*empathie*) was not to do with human relationships, or therapeutic ones, but with aesthetics and the aesthetic experience of a work of art. David Howe writes, "As our bodies resonate with the flow of the paint, the pain of face, the strength of buttress, the flight of a spire, our feelings vibrate in tune with the emotion of the work."<sup>58</sup> But this aesthetic experience could be thought of as the "power of projecting one's personality into the object of contemplation."<sup>59</sup> This makes for a subjective experience and entails a pausing of the plane of immanence for contemplation. Instead, would it be possible for empathy to be a more "speculative gesture"?<sup>60</sup>

Speculative thinking(feeling) has been thought of as being utopian, overinclusive, not pragmatic enough, in need of reflexivity, and too indiscriminate.<sup>61</sup> Still, according to Luke Moffat, the speculative is able to "think beyond the subjective, beyond the merely human, while avoiding both naïve empiricism and extreme rationalism."<sup>62</sup>

Carolyn Pedwell writes, "Affective modes of responding to art . . . associated with a mode of 'empathic vision'—conceived as a critical 'shock to thought' (Massumi, 2002) generated via our direct engagement with art's affective force—have the potential to move us beyond pre-set narratives, opening up a more radical space of ethical engagement. Empathy . . . then is not primarily about the sharing of affective experience as similar to one's own but rather is a mode of thought that might be achieved when one allows the violence of an affective experience to truly inform thinking."<sup>63</sup>

The strange hiccup, the less-than-human animalistic sound, that didn't find an invitation to land, stayed in the nonrelation as a shock to thought. What if the peculiar high-pitched inhale that keeps repeating itself is taken seriously as an object of empathic analysis? Empathy holds all modes of existence with the same dignity. Souriau writes, "At present we must identify and study those different planes, those different modes of existence, without which [in our relations of nonrelation] there would be no existence at all."<sup>64</sup>

## CREATIVE(-)RELATIONAL INQUIRY: THE HYPHEN

### *Emergency 9: Creative-Relational Inquiry Is Playful.*

The hyphen although functional feels playful, experimental, a game. The hyphen is a bed for jumping on. It makes me wonder—what if the hyphen is a tilde? What if it is creative~relational inquiry? Bouncier, more of a spring to the springboard, making for higher and further leaps. Also more aesthetically pleasing, and it works perfectly well. It still bonds and holds apart. Actually, it works better. The tilde looks like the sea of sea~cry. The sea that is open for the lightning to strike, right here on the wave. And it needs a wave. Whitehead said that the bringing together of disparate singularities is not supposed to be tranquil.<sup>65</sup> The tilde, my son tells me, means “roughly of the same value.” That works too. It provides an easier coexistence and doesn’t value one side over the other. And it offers movement. The “creative advance,” according to Whitehead, is stifled by static perfection.<sup>66</sup> The hyphen, I decide, is a perfectionist.

The creative and the relational when they come together are more than just the sum of their parts.

Creative-Relational Inquiry = (Non)Relational>Instaurative&(dis)  
Creative~Relational Inquiry

Although I am not sure the second has the same lure.

Apart from the tilde . . . ■

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